

Workshop
Monday 20th June 2011
3rd Floor Staff Canteen
VSA

FAQ's and EDUCATIONAL RATIONALE



What are the educational reasons for laptops?

It is both anecdotally true and evidenced in respected research that most of our students already own and use digital tools on a daily basis for their educational, social, personal and learning needs. More than any other group of users, our students are driving schools towards 1:1 access, as they expect and demand connectivity. Our research (at the beginning of this academic year – students, parents and teachers) indicated that almost all students in Y7-12 have access to a computer at home and that a majority of our students have their own computer.

This expectation for constant connectivity, and our capacity to provide it, has a huge affect on inquiry learning at VSA. When students use a laptop, they have the most powerful research and creation tool. They have the tool to plan and individualize their own learning. Through educationally planned, guided access to relevant resources and engagement with interactive/multimedia software, students can enjoy a far more personalized learning experience.

Additional to the individualized learning possible through laptops they also provide a powerful way to collaborate both within the classroom and beyond. Connecting students across the school and around the world, helping students find audiences for their work and work together to solve problems, share knowledge and increase learning.

Computers can in fact be compared to pencils, both are simply another tool (or piece of technology) used within the learning environment. Technology will continue to become ever more available and seamlessly integrated into the learning environment. A learning environment that can support development of 21st century skills must require appropriate use of 21st century tools. The key tool for personal and collaborative productivity is a personal computer with internet connectivity.

At VSA, we firmly believe that technology is about access to the right tool for the right task at the right time to enhance learning. Thus technology does not begin and end with laptop computers. Mobile phones, PDA's and other devices can also be leveraged for learning. VSA is developing strategies and infrastructure to bring these devices into the learning arena.

Will the laptop be used in all classes?

The laptops will not necessarily be used in every class that your child attends every day, but they will be used within all subjects. The success of our laptop program is not the

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computer being used, but computers being used appropriately to improve and maximize learning.

Here are some examples of how laptops might be used in class:

- Access to a wider array of interactive resources and information other than that which a teacher and a book provides in a traditional classroom.
- The ability to quickly download digital materials from VSA Learning and other portals, thereby saving the time, expense and wastage of paper.
- The ability for students to expand the walls of their classroom and include other students and experts in the field through online educational discourse.
- Ready access to powerful communication tools (video and podcasting, for example) through which students can demonstrate their understanding.
- The ability to directly upload data from their heart rate monitors in a science or physical education class, and import it into graph making programs giving them a visual display of data.
- The ability to simultaneously collaborate and write documents with students through the use of online tools (eg google docs) and provide the ability for peer-editing of written work.
- The ability for students to quickly have the development and understanding of work shown on the classroom's projector or an inline area (eg teachertube)

Will students be allowed to use the computer all the time in class?

Use of the computer in classroom settings will be at the discretion and direction of the teacher.

What happens if my child is better at learning with pen and paper?

Certainly pen and paper learning will not go away. Certain subject areas can more easily require pen and paper (...one example could be Math) where inputting of symbolic notation may be cumbersome.

Another of the key advantages to pen and paper has always been the ability of teachers and peers to annotate and comment in the margins. With assignments teachers could write comments, underline and correct mistakes and then hand back to the student. However annotating is now available, and often used, in modern software applications.

Annotations with pen and paper can also be powerful for active reading. Research has shown that underlining, paraphrasing and commenting whilst reading text can help readers with retention and understanding. However, currently many of the resources we give students such as textbooks and literature cannot be annotated as they need to be preserved for future students. Thus in these cases digital resources will prove a distinct advantage.

With digital resources students will retain the right to print things out if they prefer not to read from the screen, and many resources will continue to be in book form for some time to come.

What is the computer that students will use in 2011-12?

MacBook Pro – 13” – specifications at end of these FAQ’s

Will my middle school student be disadvantaged if they don’t have a Mac at home?

No, your student will carry their Mac back and forth between school and home, and each area will have a separate login environment. The working, or school, login will work within the school decided work area, the home login will come under the guidance of parents.

What will happen to the existing computers?

VSA is committed to making maximum use of our technology investments. The current plan allows us to transition to 1:1 without any “wastage” of computer resources.

How will VSA address the weight of school bags?

Weight of school bags due in large measure to heavy print textbooks is already a key concern and laptops should be a solution to this problem to some degree. One of the key reasons to move to one-to-one laptop access for students is to facilitate the moving towards online textbooks in place of printed ones. Current Macbooks which link students to a wealth of knowledge and interactive possibilities weigh 4.5 pounds. A single Physics textbook (used in only one subject) weighs over 2 pounds. Aside from weight the other key disadvantage of printed textbooks is that they are out of date by the time they reach students hands. Online textbooks and resources can be constantly up to date and contain digital text and multimedia.

What happens if a student forgets to bring the laptop to school?

Another advantage of having a standard platform across campus is that VSA libraries will have back up laptops available for students who forget to bring their laptop. Students will be required to sign a laptop check-out form to receive a loaner. Usage of this service is not seen to be an alternative to bringing a laptop to school.

What is the battery life? What will happen if the laptop's battery runs out during class?

Laptops nowadays have an excellent battery life and if fully charged at the beginning of the day should serve the students well. There are power points in all VSA classrooms and in public areas. Over the next school year, VSA will do a full study to ensure that there is appropriate accessibility to power where and when students need it. Students will need to bring their laptop's power supply to school everyday and are encouraged to have a spare battery.

Will students have access to all the same services at home as they do at school?

Like now students will be able to access all VSA website and network resources from home. Accessing personal files should be easier than before as they will be stored on the laptop and not on the school network.

Because students will have the laptop loaded with the software that they need for classes in our one-to-one environment this will be a substantial improvement over the current situation in which students only have access to software during class time, and when the teacher is able to book the computers.

Will the files on my child's laptop be backed up?

Although there are no specific plans for this right now, it is expected that students will be responsible for their own backups, the primary storage location for students' personal files will be the laptop itself. There are a variety of backup options that can be purchased and managed separately and students will be provided opportunities to learn how to use these systems at school (iCloud, iMac, Dropbox etc).

What happens if my laptop is lost or stolen?

As with other school property issued to students such as books, the family will be responsible if the item is lost or stolen. This means the student will need to purchase another laptop through the school.

What happens if the laptop is damaged accidentally?

If there is any damage to the laptop, students should bring it to the school's Tech center for repairs. If the student is away from Hong Kong they can bring it to a certified Apple repair center as the warranty is international. All computers purchased for students through the school program have a 3-year AppleCare warranty that covers the machine itself and the battery as well. Depending on the damage to the laptop, the costs for repairs and/or spare parts may be covered under the warranty. Attempting to repair the laptop yourself or in non-authorized computer centers will void the warranty.

Can I purchase the 1:1 Laptop now?

The opportunity to purchase through the school will be provided at the start of the next academic year. Details will come shortly.

Who pays for the laptops?

Laptops will be paid for by parents. The price will be considerably less expensive than purchasing the computer and software outside of school.

Laptops purchased by parents previously - even if they happen to coincide with the school selected hardware will not be eligible for the school 1:1 benefits. The school cannot legally install school-licensed software onto student owned laptops. School licensed software significantly reduces the cost. We believe, based on research and experience, that a standard, predictable platform is key to ensuring the success of 1:1 laptops in the classroom.

The computer issued by the school will be the individual student's property to take when they withdraw or graduate from VSA as soon as school licensed software has been uninstalled.

Is the computer transferable?

The computer is not transferable from the assigned student to another student.

What if my student already has a Mac?

If you have a Mac that meets minimum specifications and that is within one year old you will be able to migrate the computer into the school negotiated warranty agreement. However, the school will not be able to install school-licensed software on

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the computer and thus the computer cannot be used as part of the school 1:1 program.

Why is the school choosing Apple computers as a standard platform?

The key criteria we referred to when selecting the platform for our school in order of importance are:

1. What is best for teaching and learning and;
2. Ease of use, support and maintenance.

In a way these criteria are related. The easier to use and more reliable a platform is, the better it is for teaching and learning.

Apple has been a proven partner for education for many decades. They go beyond the normal vendor relationship by supporting schools with professional development networks. Further, the software that comes pre-loaded on Macs is the best choice for its inherent creative expression capability. Students focus on the outcome and not the process.

Why not just let students bring in any laptop? Why do they need to all be the same?

Having a support system in place is key, particularly when reflecting on the numbers of computers that will be on campus. Our strategic partnership with Apple will mean there is an onsite service center that students and families can access to receive computer maintenance onsite. If a standard school computer breaks it will be immediately replaced with a loaner unit identical to the original computer, allowing the user to continue in their educational pursuits uninterrupted by the need to learn a new system.

Furthermore, with a common platform, everyone is speaking the same “digital language.” Teachers can expect standard features and laptop capabilities and can plan lessons around them. Students too can collaborate with each other seamlessly both within the classroom and outside.

The importance of this point cannot be understated. Our research tells us that 1:1 schools that did not enforce a standard platform experienced significant problems that negatively influenced learning.

Why not create more computer labs or laptop carts?

Technology would not be available where and when it was needed. Computer labs and laptop carts generally require that you take students to the technology rather than the technology being a seamless tool that is available when it is needed.

The nature of institutional computing that requires login, locking away in carts makes use of computers more difficult and time consuming and inevitably takes away from valuable class time.

Bottom line,

1:1 allows all students access to the computer at times in which they need it.

What about the environmental impact of the laptops?

VSA is fully committed to demonstrating a responsible environmental attitude. There are several points to consider with the implementation of the 1:1 program

1. In terms of power usage Laptop computers are more efficient than desktops. Laptops only consume power when they are charging and modern smart adaptors do not consume as much power when batteries are fully charged. In comparison desktop computers tend to be left plugged in all day running
2. Although the 1:1 program will absolutely increase the number of computers on campus it is bound, over time, to reduce the number of computers in the VSA community overall because students will have the same computer at home and school.

Apple is a company dedicated to reducing its environmental footprint

For the old product or dead spare parts collected by Apple Services Providers, they ship them back to Apple's warehouse and Apple responsibly recycles them.

For general environmental concerns, customers can visit the following page on the apple website.

Chinese version: <http://www.apple.com/hk/environment/>

English version: <http://www.apple.com/hk/en/environment/>

What are the considerations around ergonomics? For instance posture and eye-strain?

Safe use including ideal posture and appropriate times to be behind a computer monitor will be a part of the computer roll outs to students. These will also be part of faculty education. These messages will be reinforced in classroom environments.

During school hours students are not likely to be behind a computer monitor for extended periods of time. Laptops will be used in class when necessary and closed when not necessary. The rapid time that the Mac returns from sleep mode makes this all the more possible.

It is important to consider that the key "content delivery" item used since the 14th century until this day, the book, is hardly an ergonomic technology. The key is that whatever tool we have we encourage students to live healthy and balanced lifestyles.

To what extent is the 1:1 program an attempt to go paperless?

Whilst the 1:1 program certainly should help us move towards a less paper heavy environment it is not the intention to remove all paper from the teaching and learning process.

The key factor with technology in education is the "right tool for the task." Reading and reviewing text on screen can encourage active reading via the various annotation tools as well as promote both active reading and collaboration with peers. Digital "textbooks" can include multimedia and interactive elements. However, often paper is still the best "tool of the task" as well.

What about my child's handwriting?

The computer will not replace handwriting. Many subjects have tasks are much easier to do on paper than via a computer keyboard, and these will continue to form part of our students learning environment.

What tools will teachers have to monitor student computer use?

The best tool to monitor what students are doing on their laptops is walking about the classroom and observing individual or group behavior. The relevant question is not so much "what are students doing on the computer" but rather "are they on task?". A teacher will know if students are on task and facilitate students to be engaged in the learning regardless of whether the task is on the computer or not.

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Aside from that there are a variety of technologies that can assist teachers in maintaining an environment focused on the learning task at hand. Apple Remote Desktop, which the school is making available to faculty, enables teachers to observe individual laptops or groups of laptops from their computers. This tool has more than a supervisory use, however, in that it can be a powerful way to bring student work front and center and onto the projector at the front of the class.

In addition there are a variety of tools installed on the laptop that allow students to focus including time management tools, software that can shut off the Internet and other distractions to focus on one application at a time.

Will students be allowed to install software onto the laptops?

Yes students will be able to install software on their laptops and may be asked to do so by the teachers to suit a learning task they have in mind.

What about bags for the computers?

VSA is not providing a bag with the laptop because the majority of students already have backpacks to store their belongings when they are at school. Feedback from the community and research into peer schools that are 1:1 has indicated that it is not ideal for students to carry another bag in addition to their regular school bag. Parents should evaluate their child's school bag to ensure that it provides adequate room and protection for the laptop and consider getting a protective case if they deem such a case necessary. Such cases which will help individualize a student laptop are readily available in Hong Kong.

What about security for the computers?

Students should have the computer either with them or in a "locked locker." VSA is committed to providing secure storage for students during the school day.

As a parent can I login to the computer?

Parents will not have accounts on the computers by default. However, if parents wish to have accounts on the machines in order to use the computer or to use parental controls the school will support this via scheduled parent education sessions. These sessions will be focused around supporting student learning and setting up appropriate parameters around the use of computer.

Has VSA considered the iPad?

Yes, the iPad is promising technology. One important element to consider is that the iPad does not run a full operating system but rather the iPhone/iTouch operating system. This would mean much of the software that student and teachers now use would not work on the iPad, and may shift the focus from learning to the technology.

What happens if a computer malfunctions or is lost?

Loaner units would be available to students from the library for the duration their computer is being serviced. The number of loaner units would be determined by the expected hardware failure rate which we expect to be low.

How will teachers be supported in the use of these computers such that they enhance student learning?

Robust and personalized professional development for all our employees will be critical in supporting teachers in the use of technology to support their students.

Professional development in the use of technology has been ongoing this academic year. We have a group of lead teachers who are advocates and mentors to their colleagues, and participation in Apple led education focused programs will be mandatory.

Won't the computers be a distraction?

One of the key reasons to go 1:1 is to reframe the role of technology tools in students lives away from being simply a means to connect with friends and personal entertainment and orient them towards thinking of technology as a tool for learning.

If one thinks of computers as enabling a kind of "distributed intelligence" between the user and the computer - in other words the computer is an extension of your own mental faculties then there is a profound difference between what happens in schools now and what can happen in 1:1. In a 1:1 setting, the students literally carry around their distributed intelligence in their backpack.

We've heard significant debate about digital natives and digital immigrants. Can young people today multitask better than previous generations? Is the way they consume information and communicate superior, and is that something we as educators and parents need to take note of? These are important questions: opinion and research is available on both sides of the issue.

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There are times in which students (and teachers) will multitask. This seems to be a reality of modern life from which one cannot escape, and one which schools would be foolish to ignore if we are serious about 21st century learning. On the other hand, some activities require deep focus. Students need to be supported in being able to engage in focused learning in a variety of ways. One way, in school, is to provide engaging and authentic learning experiences that are in and of themselves motivating for kids. Another is by modeling good use of technology - both student to student, and also teacher to student. Finally, some technological aides can help, including tools that allow users to "self monitor" Internet usage, turn off the wireless for a period of time etc.

One thing for is for sure - that we should not look at these issues in a "black and white" manner. Certainly, there are occasions that students (and adults) use technology in ways that are neither educational nor directed at learning objectives. There are times when this is appropriate and other times when it is not appropriate. In classroom settings the use of computers is for the most part teacher driven. If a student is using the computer for tasks other than specified by the teacher, the student may be asked to shut down an application or close the lid of their computer.

Outside of the classroom technology is certainly changing the ways in which students socialize with one another. Facebook, IM and other social technologies in many ways make our students more connected with each other in very positive ways. However, the flip-side can also be true, students may become so absorbed in their online world that they become disconnected from the physical. VSA pastoral care programs including homerooms, LPD and counseling will be used to help students find ways to interact with each other in positive ways. Certainly a 1:1 program exists in large measure to help students to learn to discover individually how they can improve their own learning. However, they also need to know when not to use the laptop as well.

Are other schools 1:1 schools?

There are numerous schools both international and local that are 1:1 schools now. Some schools went 1:1 as early as the 1980's. More recently there has been an acceleration of schools moving towards 1:1 for three primary reasons:

1. Affordability of reliable and fast wireless internet
2. Falling cost of hardware.
3. The number of tools, accessible through computers that have the potential to enhance the learning experience and make education relevant and

engaging to 21st century learners including multimedia tools and online social and information tools.

Will my child's eyes be adversely affected by looking at a laptop screen all day at school?

Your child will not be using the laptop in every class so there will be ample downtime in which students eyes will be able to rest. In order to avoid eyestrain, the school will include instruction in proper use of the laptop, including the proper distance to best view the screen and the setting up of the suitable screen resolution and viewing angle.

How will parents be supported?

One of the key reasons for implementing a laptop program is recognizing that learning happens anytime, anywhere - meaning at home as well as school. VSA is committed to having a constant dialogue with parents about how they can support their child as a learner as well as broader issues of technology and internet use.

Can the VSA network handle the load of every student and teacher having a laptop?

VSA has reviewed its wireless network, and is committed to upgrading during the summer break. Network usage is monitored by our IT team to ensure that students and teachers have access to the connectivity they need.

How will the school deal with prevalent social networking and "inappropriate" non educational use of the Internet at school? How does the school internet work - does VSA block sites?

The school does employ a firewall service that serves two primary functions: 1.) a security firewall that protects against viruses and malware, 2.) a content filter. The content filter blocks particular websites in categories the school chooses. The school can arrange to make exceptions to the websites (white-list) or add sites to the list (a black list).

A major component of VSA's mission is for inquiry driven and self motivated learning. We believe that students need to be provided reasonably open access to the Internet. Various reasons behind this include:

1. Even if the school blocks sites at school they will not necessarily have them blocked at home.
2. Students learn responsibility by being given the opportunity to be responsible.
3. Many of the sites that are used for “non educational” purposes during the school day are also powerful educational tools - sites including YouTube and Facebook, amongst others.
4. The times that these tools are truly inappropriate (e.g., during class), the teacher is in control of the lesson and can ask students to close programs that are not supposed to be on during class or close the lid of the laptop, much in the same way that the teacher can instruct a student to close a comic book.

Will there be education/training on how to use software?

At VSA, we know that best practice technology instruction takes place in context with the learning. For example: if students are studying data input and analysis in a science class, they learn how to use Excel for this purpose. To intentionalize this the school will work with classroom teachers to integrate technology into their lessons. Specifically for teachers, numerous professional development opportunities are in the planning including Apple Academy courses, department collaboration times, and conferences. Parents will also be supported in this journey though teacher and Apple led parent information sessions. These sessions will be focused on understanding the young learner's world in relation to technology. However, we also hope to offer some after-school sessions in which students and teachers can explore technology tools together.

Richard Parker (Head of Secondary)

Paulenne Hosegood (Learning Technology Co-ordinator)